

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

September 2011

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb



September has finally arrived! I must say that this has been a very strange year given all of the weather that we have experienced not only here in New England but throughout the entire country. Each day you wonder what will come next from mother nature. Hopefully we will soon see things settle down into a pattern that we are more used to. But then, who knows since global warming is affecting us.

September is a month that we start preparing for the winter months. It is a time where we start to look toward the rebirth of our spirituality. We still see things growing wonderfully around us, but we also know that there is a change coming which is signified by the slow change in the color of the leaves. For us as monastics, it is also a period of time when we start to look inward and analyze where we have been for the last 9 months in our spiritual path. Did we plan on doing something but did not get it done yet? Did we decide on which books/writings that we want to “enjoy” during the winter months? Did we make that trip to the monastery we had planned on? The list can go on and on for each individual. Each of us has a spiritual path we are traveling on, but during our travels we need to take the time to review (and correct, if necessary) that path to make sure we are headed in the right direction for our spiritual growth. Fall gives us the last period of preparing for the winter so that we can continue our growth. Because it was so very hot this summer I have not made my yearly trek up to Spencer, MA to walk the grounds and visit the bookstore at St. Joseph’s Abbey. It is on my “to do list” to accomplish in September/October. I always enjoy the drive up there especially in the Fall since I can stop along the way to enjoy some of the delicious fresh from the farm, apple-filled foods which I truly love. In the bookstore, I can find so many different things to fill my days during the winter time. I can even treat myself to the jams/jellies they make right there at the Abbey. I save my money all year just so I can go to the Abbey and not feel guilty about spending some money! The grounds are so quiet and beautiful. You feel drawn into a great spiritual space as you walk around on the grounds or enter into the Church. The monks are very friendly and helpful when you come across them, although it is rare to encounter them since they are very busy working and praying. However, a visitor will always find a monk in the

bookstore to help you find and purchase what you are looking. So as you can see, I have things left on my “to do list” that need to be attended to before the first snow arrives here in Massachusetts. I believe that each one of us has things left on our “to do list” also. Now is the time to sit down and review it and see if it is still possible to accomplish those things.

While you are looking at your “to do list” you will also want to take a long hard look at where you are spiritually. Did you make the progress you were hoping to make for so far this year? What are the positives and negatives that you have found in your spiritual walk? What could you have done better? If you did not make it as far as you had planned, why not? Know that there is still time to move forward before Advent starts. Sometimes our best laid plans just seem to fall apart. That is part of living our monastic lives within the world. We lay out our plans, and for some reason, we are unable to accomplish those plans. Why did you not accomplish your plans? Did you allow the world to step into your life to the point that you did not take the time for your spiritual studies and growth? Hey, it happens, but each one of us needs to be aware of such happenings and learn to control our lives better. Sometimes, that is not so simple to do when you must work to support yourself. With some discipline, however, it can be done. Perhaps, you realized that the spiritual path you set for yourself was not the path you should have taken. Taking inventory is necessary so that you can move forward in living a God-centered life.

Monastic life is full of such introspection to help us move forward. Sometimes we get so caught up in doing things that we forget to listen and hear what God wants of us. Maybe it means a change in our spiritual path or maybe just a small change in how we lay out our daily life. But, we have to be willing to listen and to take an honest look at ourselves. There are times that we need to reach outside of ourselves to seek counsel/guidance as to how to proceed. Monastics should not live in a vacuum but live their lives in a way that moves them closer to God -- exemplifying God’s love to the world.

Often times I hear people say that unless they are monastic, they do not have a spiritual path to walk. Well, let me set you straight right now. All of God’s children have spiritual paths to walk. Each path is unique to that person. Yes, some are called to live their lives as monastics, while others are called to live their life as single, married, or divorced person. But everyone has a spiritual path to walk and attain! Each of us to begin with have to realize that we are children of God, thus we need to live our lives showing to others who God is. And yes, that means we have to be willing to step outside our comfort level to be loving and respectful of everyone we come into contact with. That is often a very difficult thing to do. We all have our reasons – excuses – for not wanting to do things or be around certain people, etc. When we do that, however, we are forgetting our true heritage: a Child of God who is made in the likeness of God. Everyone on this earth, no matter what their religious teachings or lack of teachings, is God’s Child and we must treat one another as such. So, have you taken your spiritual inventory? Do you have things that you need to work on and accomplish before winter? I would suspect we all have things to accomplish before winter!

This month I am sharing writing by Br. Yossi. Br. Yossi is a hermit monastic who is not attached to any monastic order or church. He does have several mentors who help him as he dashes his foot against a rock on his monastic path. He has a way of looking at things and putting them into words that others, if they listen, can see God in all of his goodness in this world. His monasticism does not fit into any box that religion/church tries to make! That is what makes him such a unique monastic. Don’t try to define him as you will never be able to do it! Listen to his words and be willing to open your hearts to what he is saying. As he loves to say, Dance with the Beloved (God)!

Encountering God in Church

by: Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Isaiah 56:7)

The title of this article appears to be a contradiction. Isn't Church a place where we should encounter God? We know that we not only have a personal relationship with God but that we also have a communal relationship with Him. That is why as a community, we pray our Eucharistic prayer: "Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the [comm]unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours Almighty God, now and forever". We as Church are a community or assembly of God's people who have come together not only to praise and worship God as one body but also to demonstrate to one another -- and to all who walk through our church doors -- the unconditional love, forgiveness, and mercy that Christ taught us in the Beatitudes and that He exemplified in His earthly life.

Whether or not we encounter God in Church depends on the beliefs of that church as well as whether or not the laity and clergy of that church have open minds and loving hearts, exemplifying Christ to all. The Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church is an inclusive church where all are welcome not only to worship but also to partake of the Eucharist. Being inclusive and welcoming means that each person must set aside his/her personal beliefs and prejudices -- that is, our judgments of one another. It does not matter what that person's religion, lifestyle, political affiliation, race, color, etc. is. **What matters is that this person is a child of God and deserves to be treated with love.** God's "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Only in a "judgment free zone" can Church be a place where God's children can truly encounter God and allow His Grace to transform them.



Rev. Dr. Jacqueline J. Lewis, Senior Minister at Middle Collegiate Church and Executive Director of The Middle Project, a leadership training institute for people of faith, writes:

"All of the creation is waiting, like those children in line, for those of us who call ourselves Christian to come out on the side of love. We are each created in God's image; each human being is awesomely and wonderfully made. We are designed for love, not hatred; created for community, not apartheid.

I am calling on Christians to come out of the closet, to show ourselves and to reveal ourselves as Children of God. Being Christian means having an informed faith: a faith that is felt deeply in our hearts and souls; critically examined, critiqued and engaged with our minds; serviced with our strength.

To come out means reading the biblical texts through the law that Jesus himself described: Love God with your heart, soul, strength and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). What do these texts mean for us today, given Jesus' imperative to love? Our congregations need to be bold in searching for God's call in this day and time; they need to be radically welcoming of all of God's people."

Do you feel welcome in your church? What do you do to make other members and visitors feel welcome? Do you practice mercy over judgment? If you show love and mercy, then you will encounter God in Church since you will see Him in each of your brothers and sisters.

Living (and Dancing) in the Present

By: Yossi A. Lopez-Hineynu

If we live stuck in the past we cannot grow; same if we live in a future yet to be born. Amazing how many folks do either one, or even both. There's nothing wrong with memories, it's the getting stuck in them to the point that the time in which they were made becomes idyllic. The future is not-yet, so we need tend the present. Keeping our eyes on the prize (whatever it is) keeps us from looking around at the beauty that is Life now. We miss it.

How amazing when we allow our senses to flow and open. It's being fully aware. It takes practice, but living presently allows to dwell in the womb of God, Who is ever-present. Today, while taking my daily walk, I really felt each foot hit the sidewalk, the breeze caress my face, the sweat running down my back, the sounds of nature and living around me. It was Oneness, yet I did not lose my bearings.

While I didn't achieve that state permanently, I find it seems to be progressive. I am more aware now than before that walk. This grows if I simply allow it to be. It's difficult to put into words. I am not holy nor am I different than anyone else who works at this. I am just who I am...



Photo of the Lucy Unwin sculpture

Living in the present is like doing the Dances of Universal Peace which involve people in one, two or three large circles. As the beautiful Sufi chants and music begin, you look at your partner, take each other's hands, and dance around each other, never taking your eyes off each other. That's powerful enough, but as you circle, you both eventually become partners with the person next to you and the cycle repeats until you've gotten around the entire circle. It's fairly fast-paced, so as you switch partners, it seems as if but one person's standing in front of you, though it's many over the course of the dance: all colors, genders, shapes, sizes. Differences don't matter, because it is an experience of unconditional love.

During the dances time stops. Only Life is real, and herein lived really. All of Life can actually be like that if we let it wherein we still get necessary things done, but time slows and we are more alive.

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Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yossi and Jim
Linda and Wayne
Fr. David and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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